United Nations S/2016/910

Security Council

Distr.: General
28 October 2016

Original: English

Letter dated 28 October 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter from the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, dated 27 October 2016 (see annex).

I should be most grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**

16-18878 (E) 021116

Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 28 October 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On Wednesday, 26 October, at approximately 11.30 a.m. Damascus time, six indiscriminate air strikes perpetrated by either Syrian regime or Russian forces targeted the village of Has, in the Ma'arrat al-Nu'man countryside, southern Idlib, striking a school complex that included an elementary and middle school. The attacks, which took place while classes were still in session, left at least 22 schoolchildren and six teachers dead and countless others injured.

The Idlib attacks were among the most heinous and lethal to date, in a conflict that has been defined by unprecedented destruction and State-sponsored savagery. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the attacks on Idlib may in fact "be the deadliest attack on a school since the war began more than five years ago". Sadly, however, they were not isolated attacks.

Since the start of 2016, UNICEF has verified at least 38 attacks on schools around Syria. Of the 60 schools that Save the Children supports in Idlib and neighbouring Aleppo, 44 have been affected by bombing this year alone, with several badly damaged. At least 20 students and teachers from schools supported by Save the Children have been killed or injured this year alone. The vast majority of these attacks have been perpetrated via air strikes launched by the Syrian regime or Russia. According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, these attacks have killed hundreds of children in opposition-held areas (see A/HRC/33/55).

The pattern of attacks on Syria's children, including the repeated bombardments, is symptomatic of a policy by the Syrian regime and Russia to deliberately and systematically target schools in an effort to sow fear in Syria's civilian population. The targeting of Syria's schools, and the repeated failure of the Syrian regime and Russia to take even the most basic of precautions to protect Syrian civilians from indiscriminate attacks, constitute a gross violation of international humanitarian law, in particular article 51 of Additional Protocol I of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016). Yet, throughout the course of the Syrian crisis, no actions have been taken to hold either the Syrian regime or Russia accountable for their flagrant war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The failure of the Security Council to take even the most basic steps to deter these strikes and protect Syria's children from indiscriminate slaughter has allowed the attacks on Idlib and across Aleppo to escalate and worsen. The members of the Council must take immediate action to prevent these brazen attacks and hold those responsible to account. We, the Syrian National Coalition, thus join the calls of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs upon "Council members who have operational military assets in Syria to take concrete steps to halt the aerial bombardment of civilian areas in order to deliver on your existing international obligations and, above all, to protect civilians".

We appeal to Member States:

(a) To protect Syrian civilians through the enforcement of a nationwide no-bomb zone aimed at deterring attacks such as those perpetrated against Idlib's children on 26 October;

(b) To impose punitive measures sanctioning the Syrian regime and Russia for their continued defiance of international law and wilful killing of innocent children;

(c) To ensure accountability for all parties responsible for indiscriminate attacks on Syrian children, including Russia, by referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. Should a referral continue to be impeded by Russia, it is imperative that members take action under national or universal jurisdiction, and work through the General Assembly to establish a special tribunal on the situation in Syria and request an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice.

Each day that the Security Council waits to deter air strikes in Syria through the enforcement of coercive measures, more Syrian children die. Syria's children want and need the bombs to stop. Failure by the members of this Council to save Syria's children from this most cruel and savage form of death is tantamount to acceptance of Russian and Syrian war crimes.

(*Signed*) Anas **Abdah**
President
Syrian National Coalition

Enclosure

Deaths and aerial bombardment in Aleppo and Idlib

- There have been at least 305 deaths, including 258 civilians, in Aleppo, according to the Violations Documentation Center in Syria.
- There have been at least 72 deaths, including 31 civilians, in Idlib, according to the Violations Documentation Center in Syria.
- Syrian regime and Russian Federation aerial bombardment was responsible for 63 per cent of civilian deaths in Idlib and Aleppo in the first 10 days of June, according to the Violations Documentation Center in Syria.
- At least 22 Russian and Syrian warplanes and 16 helicopters were operating in the air above Aleppo and Idlib.
- The Syrian regime and Russian forces continually targeted Aleppo and Idlib with air strikes, barrel bombs, cluster munitions and thermobaric weapons.
- In Aleppo, the Syrian regime and Russian forces continued to bomb the Castello road, the sole land exit route for civilians, with reports of artillery bombardment by Kurdish forces on the Castello road.
- In Idlib, Syrian regime and Russian forces bombed residential areas, a mosque, a school and a public marketplace, in breach of the cessation of hostilities agreement. Many Syrians have, as a result, fled from the city of Idlib and all shops and institutions are closed.